

HER GUARDIAN FROM AVENUE A

By BENNET MUSSON

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A cab stood waiting in a cross street near Fifth avenue. It was an ordinary cab, with its driver arrayed in a livery which could be taken for that of a private family, but to the mind of Billie McAdam it was associated with ill omen.

It is a far cry from Avenue A to Fifth avenue, but Billie had made the transition, with the assistance of Frances Hartley. On one of her slumming tours she had found him, ragged, cold and hungry, the center of a group of hostile urchins who were about to engage him in combat. She had rescued the boy from his perilous position and had interviewed his intoxicated and acquiescent father.

The result of the negotiation had been Billie's installation as hall boy in the Hartley mansion, where the complacency with which he regarded the grandeur of his surroundings and the elegance of his green, brass buttoned uniform was almost balanced by his deep rooted feeling of gratitude for Miss Frances.

If the facile and independent mind of Billie McAdam had one responsibility it was the conviction that he must at all times act as the protector and guardian of Frances Hartley. There was her father, of course, a dignified, aristocratic and prejudiced gentleman of the old school. He counted, in a way, but Billie felt vaguely that Wilfred Hartley could not hark back from his thirty years' experience in society and clubdom and sympathize thoroughly with a motherless girl of twenty-two, who was impressionable, light hearted and rather thoughtless.

Then there was Henry Beach. If being young, rich, handsome and impulsive were all the requisites of life Henry was a person to whom Billie's responsibilities of guardianship could be transferred. But there were other things that Billie did not understand, but which Mr. Hartley set such store by that they must be of prime importance.

They were negative, most of these things, not having one's father in the retail trade, not being in the shallows of society instead of firmly anchored in its depths.

With the prejudice of youth Billie allowed the feelings of Wilfred Hartley to influence him. He liked Henry Beach, but on the occasions when he admitted him to the house, frequently occasions on which Mr. Hartley was absent, he did not exhibit much cordiality.

Such a time had come this morning. Billy had noted the hired carriage in which Beach arrived. He had observed an unusual flutter of expectancy in Frances' greeting of the young man. Going to the corner to mail a letter, he had seen the cab waiting in a side street. Returning to his station on a hall bench, he noticed that the voices which came in subdued tones from the drawing room had in them a note of suppressed excitement.

Billie sat on his bench and fidgeted. Then he deserted his post, stole into the library and, noiselessly pushing back a folding door, installed himself behind some curtains in the drawing room.

Frances Hartley stood near a window, and beside her was Henry Beach, who looked imploringly at her tear stained face.

"I cannot bear to deceive my father, Henry," she said as Billie guiltily secured his place of vantage.

"It is for only once, dear," Beach replied low and earnestly. "We can go in the cab I have waiting and be back here safely married by the time your father returns from the club. Then there will be a scene, and the worst that can happen will be his withholding his forgiveness for a week or two. And so the man talked as many men have talked before.

Frances demurred, but in the end her head sank to Henry's shoulder, and Billie knew she was the woman who hesitates, and he stole softly away.

His idea of the duties of a guardian was elemental; it was to strike straight from the shoulder. His first thought was to get rid of the cab, his next to notify Mr. Hartley.

Seating himself at the library table, he hastily printed the following note:

Kum Home to Once I have took the Marriage. BILLIE.

Addressing this to Mr. Hartley, he hurried to the hall, grasped his cap and ran to the waiting cab.

"Gent wants to see ye at de house. I'll hold yer horses," he announced to the cabman, relapsing in his excitement to his familiar Avenue A dialect.

Billie waited until the map had turned the corner. Then he climbed to the driver's seat of the cab, grasped the reins and started the horses. Presently the doorman of a Fifth avenue club was surprised to see a small boy in a green uniform imperiously beckon to him from the seat of a carriage. When the man wonderingly approached a crumpled note was thrust into his hand, with the injunction that it be delivered to Mr. Hartley at once.

Billie's dominant idea was to keep the cab away from the house until all danger of an elopement should be over. The thought that other cabs might be obtained did not occur to him. He drove slowly until he saw Mr. Hartley hurry from the club. Then he turned the horses down Fifth avenue and reconnoitered from a safe distance.

On the brown horse steps of the Hartley house stood Frances, Henry Beach and the cab driver, the latter

evidently describing his loss, for he was violently gesticulating. Presently Mr. Hartley ascended the steps, and the attitudes of two of the group changed entirely.

It was now evident to Billie McAdam that the offices of his guardianship had been satisfactorily attended to. He brought the whip down with a snap on the backs of the horses, resolved to restore those steeds to their master.

The animals resented this treatment to the extent of starting forward viciously. At that moment a tall horse dashed by, its guard merrily tooting his horn, and this distraction completed the demoralization of the hitherto docile beasts, for when Billie reached the Hartley house the horses were beyond his control.

A lumbering electric bus swerved toward the curb at that juncture, and the frightened animals, trying to avoid this threatening monster, took to the sidewalk. There was a crash as the cab collided with an iron railing, and Billie, pale and unconscious, was thrown into an area.

That night as Billie lay in his bed in his little room in the servants' quarters with a separate ache in each joint of his small body the door was opened, and Mr. Hartley, Frances and Henry Beach entered.

"How are you feeling now, William?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Pretty well, sir," said Billie, manfully subduing the aches.

There seemed to be some sort of an understanding between the young couple and Mr. Hartley, for he first regarded them with a look of recently acquired complacency. Then he again turned to Billie.

"William," he said, "I have learned today that extreme ideas of caste are unsatisfactory things to hold in a republic, as they often lead to drastic measures on the part of sentimental persons. Your own mental and physical methods I can commend as being violent and dangerous, but effectual. Frances, Mr. Beach and I are paying you this final visit before retiring for the purpose of thanking you."

Billie blinked uncomprehendingly at the old gentleman, but the situation, not the words, impressed itself on his understanding. The aches and pains and the Avenue A dialect were again asserting themselves. He turned wearily on his pillow.

"If dere's t' be any runaways in dis family I'll take care of 'em," he said sleepily.

A Shattering Bath.
In the "New Letters and Memories of Jane Welsh Carlyle" is a letter from that witty lady written from a health resort, in which she gives an amusing description of her experience under medical treatment:

"A bath woman in a thick white flannel gown, like a white Russian bear, came to my bedside at 6 in the morning and swathed me tightly, like a mummy, first in dry blankets, then heaped the feather bed and bedclothes atop of me, leaving only my face uncovered, then went away for an hour, committing me to what Paulet calls my 'distract ideas' and the sense of suffocation, all the blood in my body seeming to get pressed up into my head.

"Only one thought remained to me—could I roll myself over, feather bed and all, on to the floor and then roll on toward the bell, if there were one, and ring it with my teeth? I tried with superhuman effort, but in vain. I was a mummy and no mistake. So nothing remained to me but to put off going raging mad till the last possible moment.

"When the bath woman came back at 7 she was rather shocked at my state; put me in a shallow bath and poured several pitchers of water over me to compose my mind. It shattered me all to tatters."

Not Business.
A man with an arsenal of bills went into Mr. Schoppenheim's restaurant and asked permission to tack a hundred or so to the wall.

"Not wos does?" asked Schoppenheim.

"Circulars advertising a cheap railway excursion."

"You goes away off for a week or den days, and you goes cheaper as to stay at home?" asked Schoppenheim.

"That's it."

"Unt you vants to hang dose circulars mein restaurant in?"

"You've got it."

"Got vot?"

"The idea."

"Den mein customers would read dose circulars?"

"That's the idea."

"Unt go away den days or two weeks?"

"Yes."

"Unt don't eat dinners here vile dey vos away?"

"Well, they could hardly do that, you know," said the handbill man hesitatingly.

"Dot's vot I dinks meinself. Nein; I guess I von't have any of dose pills hung mein restaurant in. Good day, mein friend!"—London Telegraph.

The Farmer.
The farmer ought to be the cleanest man in his neighborhood, both as to his person and in his character; the gentlest of all gentlemen, the most prompt to meet every obligation, financial and otherwise; the most ready to see and help the neighbor who is in trouble, on time in all his farm operations, ready to take a hand in straightening out any crookedness in the public affairs of his community and of the larger field in which he happens to live, kind in his family relations, positive in all his convictions, yet not self assertive enough to drive men from the truth. Why should the farmer be all this? Because he has been blessed in having a home so near the heart of nature that he ought to study something of nature's wisdom, strength and springiness.—Farm Journal.

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